

Saturday, April 15, 2023 ▫ Read Acts 20:20

Questions from the Scripture text: What didn't the apostle keep back (v20)? How much of it? In what two ways did he convey these helpful things? In what two places?

Of what does the primary ministry of an elder consist? Acts 20:20 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In this verse of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **biblical shepherding is primarily a ministry of the Word, which must include both preaching and teaching, and must occur both in the congregational assembly and in each particular home.**

In vv18–19, we learned that the apostle's example to the elders was one of the lowliness of the minister, but the Lordliness of Jesus, Who is worth all effort and suffering, and Who uses lowly servants in His Lordly power. The next two verses turn the focus to the ministry by which the Lord exercises this power through His servants: the ministry of preaching and teaching.

Every help is in the Word. The apostle introduces the proclaiming and teaching of the Word by describing this ministry as “keeping back nothing helpful.” In other words, the Word has in it everything that is necessary to carry believers through their Christian walk in this world. As he would later write, the Old and New Testament Scriptures are sufficient—even abundant—to furnish the man of God for every good work (cf. 2Tim 3:14–16).

There are other, ordained means of grace (namely, especially, the sacraments and prayer) by which the Lord has appointed to make effectual to the believer what His Word says. But the Word contains everything helpful. Faithful shepherding (whether of an elder in the congregation, or a husband/father at home) will be full of the Word, adding nothing to it, and certainly leaving nothing out of it (cf. v27).

In every way. There are many New Testament words for the ministry of the Word. The two that the Spirit uses here covers the gamut. “Proclaimed and taught” is what we mean when we frequently say “preaching and teaching.” They sound similar, but there is a very important distinction.

In preaching, the minister is a messenger, a herald, an ambassador. He addresses you directly with something personal. It demands response. Even more, the Lord Himself is addressing you through the minister. The Scriptures are always living and active, but it is especially in that proclamation from heaven that we experience them that way (cf. Heb 4:12 in the context of Heb chs 2–4, 12).

In teaching, the minister is an educator. He instructs and explains. He communicates doctrine and facilitates understanding of how it fits together. There is a body of knowledge that every person needs, and the Lord's way of giving it to them is not merely (or even primarily) through personal study. Someone who does “personal study” of Acts 20:20 should come to the conclusion that Jesus has provided him with instructors, and he must seek to be instructed by them.

Neither of these—the preaching or teaching—should be left out of any ministry of the Word. If there is preaching without teaching, then ministers are culpable if the Lord's flock turns out to be empty-headed. If there is teaching without preaching, then ministers are culpable if the Lord's flock turns out to be cold-hearted. Either one of these conditions is spiritually deadly. A deficient ministry of the Word will produce a body that is either cancerous (overgrowth of that which is not true) or comatose (everything in place but inactive).

In every setting. There are two great institutions that the Lord has ordained, within which His Word is ministered: the church and the household. As the apostle reminds the Ephesian elders of his own exemplary ministry, he emphasizes that his ministry neglected neither one of these institutions. He preached and taught “publicly and from house to house.”

To the church, the apostle preached in the assembly of the people—in the gathering of the congregation. As we learn from the chapters of Hebrews referenced above, this is especially an element of the public worship of God. As they gather, believers are to hear the Lord Jesus declare God's Name to them as His brethren (cf. Heb 2:12). In the public worship (cf. Ps 95:1–7c), they are to hear His voice (cf. Ps 95:7d–11; Heb 2:1, 3:7–4:15, 12:22–29).

But v20 tells us that the apostle's ministry in the assembly was also one of education and instruction. The preaching in the public worship must be *doctrinal* preaching. It is by hearing and believing Jesus, Whom they hear via the preacher, that members of the congregation are brought to faith (cf. Rom 10:14–15). Jesus tells them particular things about Himself that they believe *from Him*, in response to which they believe *upon Him*. And it is through the *renewing of their minds* that He transforms believers (cf. Rom 12:2). His Word, by which He makes His people holy, is a Word of truth (cf. John 17:17; 2Tim 2:15; Jam 1:18).

Then, there is the ministry from house to house. In the day and time of the author, ministry in the assembly has fallen on hard times, but ministry house-to-house has fared even worse. It is nearly non-existent. Morning and evening family worship has ever been the duty of husbands and fathers in the church (cf. Deut 6:6–7; Eph 5:26, 6:4). Day by day, they are to lead their family through the Word of God, with a special view toward their family's spiritual Sabbath care (cf. Ex 20:10).

Now in v20, the apostle reminds the elders of *his own* ministry in each house. They are to continue this house-to-house ministry in his absence. Both preaching (addressing the household in behalf of God) and teaching (seeing to the household's assimilation of Scripture content and doctrine) are ministries that elders are to oversee and participate in. Obviously, the most frequent shepherd in the home is the father/husband, but what he does is to be facilitated and overseen by the elders.

What has God given you that is able to give every sort of help that you need in the Christian life? Which do you have a greater need to get more of and attend more to: preaching or teaching? How is the elders' ministry in the assembly being combined with their ministry in your home?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for Your sufficient, effective, instructive Word. Grant that nothing helpful from Your Word would be missing from the ministry that we sit under. Thank You for calling and gifting shepherds among Your flock—and specifically for the ones that You have given our congregation. Grant that our congregational assemblies, and each of our Christian homes, would be places where Your word is proclaimed and taught—which we ask in Jesus's Name, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP119W “Lord, Let My Cry before You Come” or TPH172 “Speak, O Lord”

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(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Acts 20 verse 20. These are God's words. How I cut back. Nothing. That was helpful. What proclaimed it to you. And taught you. Publicly. And from house to house.

Here, the apostle reminds the effusion elders. Of that which helped and it doesn't help because of how clever, the apostle was or skilled. Uh, it helps because god is the one who helps. And so since it depends upon god, who is appointed its way of helping. It is the ministry to which they too are called.

Not only because god is the only one who can help because as he will say not too many verses from now, the church belongs to god. He bought it with his own blood. His spirit is the one who installs the overseers that are there. And so they are not as it were their own men.

They must do what god has appointed. To be done by which to help. As people. And so, he says, That as he serve the lord with all humility, and many tears. Trials in verse 19. The service was in keeping back. Nothing, that was helpful. But note, what he goes on to say about proclaimed.

It to you and taught you. And that's already reminds us and teaches us that every help. Is in the word of god. This is what he uses to do his work. He had given us a hint of this already. By the way that he created. God used his word to create it.

He spoke and it was he commanded. And it stood fast. And so he used his word to create. And anticipation of The word, the One who is the word of god, god dishonored, the second person of the triune God the word because becoming flesh. And the word being the one who redeems us, the one by whom god redeems us.

And therefore he has used his words. As an expression of this as he says, in psalm 138 He has exalted his word above all his name. That is of all the different ways that call it displays. Uh, or communicates to us who he is. It is especially his word.

And now we hear that, his word is not only a display of who he is. It is the means by which he works. It is the means by which he Helps us. We may think that. There are many things that we need to do and it is true. There are many things that are commanded.

There are many things that are right good and proper and even helpful. But it is his word. By which god works. And so, every help. Is in the word. There are other ordained means of grace by which the lord. Has appointed to make effectual to the believer. What his word says.

But the word contains everything that is helpful. There are no other means of grace, but those, which the word Commands and tells us about, And they never apply anything to us, that it is that is not itself, communicated to us. By the word. And so, the faithful shepherding with which, the apostle is reminding the elders.

They have been the beneficiaries of is a shepherding by the word and the faithful shepherding, which the apostle is now calling the elders to continue in Ephesus, is a shepherding by way of the word. And husbands and fathers. Therefore as those who are called to be shepherds in the congregation.

Their ministry is primarily a ministry of the word and we see that even, you know, we at the end of Ephesians 5 in the beginning of Ephesians 6. The husband who loves his wife is imitating christ, who loves his wife, how and why that he might Uh, sanctify her by washing of water with the word to present her to himself blameless in the last day.

And what husband can think that he is loving or providing for or protecting his wife, if he is aiming at something lower than her being presented to christ perfect. In the last day, So, the shepherding of the husband is primarily by way of the word, In the separating of the father.

You're not provoke your children to laugh but bring them up in Discipline and instruction of the lord. Both of which words. Um, have primarily in their content in the word. And so the word is what god uses to train us to furnish us for every good work as the apostle say to Timothy in almost the last of his writing in the new testament.

Second Timothy 3 verses 14 through 16, reminding Timothy, not only of those scriptures that he had grown up knowing from babyhood, but also that which he has heard from the apostle and then summarizing and reminding that all scripture is breathed out by god. And it's useful. For that training and reproof and doctrine, correction.

And righteousness. Um, to prepare to furnish the man of god for every good work. So when he says, I kept back, nothing, that was helpful. He does not mean he implemented all the programs and had the activities and planned, all the retreats and instituted small groups. And canceled. Preaching services in order to do so.

No. It means he gave. The word. And we're going to hear more about that later because he's going to talk about the whole council of god and how that is actually necessary in order. Uh, for someone who is entrusted with the shepherding of souls, not to be called to account for their blood, like the watchmen and ezekeil Uh, 33.

So every help is in the word and the using the word in every way or in these two great ways that summarize all the different Uh, types of the use of the word, you get back. Nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed, it to them and taught This is. Another way of saying what we often summarize when we say preaching and teaching that labor to which some elders are called vocationally, you remember the elder being worthy of double honor in first Timothy but especially the one who's Whose labor?

Is in preaching and teaching. Or as the apostle, says it here. But proclaimed it to you and taught you. The word proclaimed, being a word that comes from the idea of being a messenger or an ambassador, a herald, he stands and gives a personal message from the one who sent him.

And so, it is not only to be Received as a verbal abstraction a collection of words and thoughts, and ideas to be considered. We will think about that, actually, in the next part when we think about end taught you, But it is a personal message, expecting a personal response.

It is the impact. Of the will and mind and personality of the one who is sending the word upon the life. Of the one who is receiving the word? In preaching you demand a response, you demand. And experience. Uh, and in hearing preaching. You ought to be experiencing god.

In the preaching. And responding to god. And how you receive and respond to the preaching. Not responding not changing, not interacting with god is itself. An incorrect response to preaching. This is one of the things that we must fight. Um, whether it's in family worship right now, I am addressing you.

In the morning and the evening way that Deuteronomy, 6 describes telling The words of gods to your children. Um, That you would just kind of be going through the motions waiting for it to end. We? Do this, not just because our flash is resistant. To responding to god and interacting with him, which it is.

But also the art creatureliness is just weak. We? Uh, we have days where we are more tired, or where we are ill or where it's just a low brain function, day or us. And yet, these are means by which We are called, not just to listen. But to interact with the lord in his work, And so this was, this was one primary thing.

He did act as a herald Um, representing board as as god's ambassador representative Christ. As christ's ambassador. And engaging the people that they would be engaged not with the preacher so much. Although the preacher is the lord's servant and he is to be engaged with and interacted with in that capacity.

But that they would be engaged with and interact with the lord. You get back. Nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you. And, Taught you. There is a. Um, A necessary truth component, propositional theological component to the ministry of the word. That in teaching the minister the elder is to educate.

Is to instruct and explain. Who communicates doctrine? He tries to help the hearer understand how things fit together, so that your mind will be stored with knowledge and understand a system of truth. That reflects the way that truths fit together in the mind of god as it were. Speaking as men do.

The way truth fits together in reality. Systematic theology is necessary because teaching is appointed by god. To be. Part of that, which has helpful. And if we do not do systematic theology, if we do not do doctrine, if we do not do instruction, Uh, in understanding. The ideas. That describe the reality of who god is and who we are.

And how things came to be this way and what god has done about it and so forth. Um, if we do not do that theology, then we are being kept back. From what is helpful? There's a body of knowledge that every person needs. And the lord's way of giving it to us is not merely or even primarily personal study.

Someone who does personal study of the bible? Would come or should come to act 20 verse 20 and say oh, God gives us teachers. I am supposed to learn from someone. I am not just supposed to quote unquote to do my own research. And god forbid that that euphemism, that means I googled something and took a few results.

And now I think I know as much as someone who has spent their life studying it Even worse. When it comes. To the theology that the lord teaches us in the bible. And we read the bible and we see, oh, He gives us teachers. There are those who keep back what it's helpful.

From themselves. By considering their own ideas. As the source. Of their knowledge and training. Rather than seeking out to be taught by god. Neither of these two things, the preaching. The personal urgent. Uh demand for interaction with god or the teaching, the systematic storing up of knowledge and understanding of how it fits together.

Neither of these should be left out of the ministry of the word. If there is preaching without teaching. Than ministers are guilty for whatever empty headedness. There is in the flock and how easily they are. Uh, are turned away. By ideas that seem interesting or even true and desirable to them.

If there is preaching without teaching, then ministers are guilty. For the empty headedness of their flock. And if there is Teaching without preaching. The ministers are guilty, if they're flock, turns out to be empty hearted. Those who know a ton of theology. They have no desire for god. No experience of him.

No affection towards others. No humility. That ought to come. With a great amount of knowledge in which you are experiencing god. But without the experience of god, a great amount of knowledge does what scripture says knowledge puffs up And so neither. Uh, neither must be missing. In fact, if you have a very robust preaching ministry, or a very robust, teaching ministry, you have even greater need of the other Last what we end up with is a caricature and that, which is designed to be helpful to us the word of god.

We actually end up having in a harmful way. Lacking. The application in the preaching. Or locking the doctrine. In the teaching. And so, The word gives every help and it must be used in every way. Primarily and under these two great categories that we see here, preaching and teaching.

Uh, in every setting. The lord has appointed to great institutions for our training. And the first is, Well, the first of the two mentioned here. Is the church and the second is the family. And elders have a ministry to both. Elders. Ministers have a ministry first in the congregation, in the assembly, in the public worship of god, this is one of the reasons why we call it the public worship of god.

Is. After this passage. He proclaimed and taught. Publicly. So, to the church, the apostle preached in the assembly of the people, in the gathering of the congregation. This is, this is A primary if not the primary part. Of the public worship of god, hebrews, when it talks about, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.

When it talks about the great, Glory of the christian worship gathering over against everything else. The great glory of the christian worship gathering is that in the assembly, jesus addresses, his church Through the servant to preaches on earth that it is christ who declares it. His father's named to us that it is christ who Who speaks from heaven.

And we must therefore not neglect the salvation that he proclaims will refuse. Him who speaks jesus addresses us. In public worship. And so in the preaching in public worship, it is both doctrinal preaching and applicational preaching. It is a preaching that teaches and it is a preaching that proclaims Jesus comes by the preacher.

And he tells us particular things about himself that we are to believe, and when we believe him about himself, faith comes by hearing the word of god. Jesus also comes to us by the preacher. And he addresses us with god's word in order to make us. Holy just as he prayed, would happen when he prayed to the father sanctify them by your truth.

Your word is truth. And so there is the truth of the word that is addressed to us by Jesus himself in the preaching and in the teaching. And that he uses to bring us to faith and that he uses to grow us in faith. And we must not keep ourselves from, and we anything helpful and we must seek a ministry.

In which the elders are not keeping back anything helpful publicly, but there is also a ministry that is from house to house. A ministry that occurs primarily by the father and the husband For the elders of the church. Cannot feasibly be in every home every day. And they are first and foremost officers in whom God has placed in the congregation not just in the home.

Indeed, the home is the training ground, and we are taught by scripture to recognize those whose shepherding the Lord has blessed in their homes, their ministry to their wife and to their children as one of the ways by which you can observe and see whom God has calling to the office of a shepherd and overseer, a pastor, an elder.

In the congregation. But, The apostle did not just leave it to the husbands and fathers to minister in their homes. The elders are to go into the homes from time to time. And address as Jesus's representatives address each household, each family with the word from the Lord. Urging upon them, that, which they have been hearing in the public ministry urging upon them, that which is contained in the scriptures.

The elders or to go into the homes from time to time and to teach them to see where the family is doctrinally. To find out what the husband has been preaching and teaching among his own family and to back him up to reinforce. Yes, these are the things that Christ preaches and teaches.

You should teach these things to your family and preach them to your family or to the family. You should heed your husband. You should heed your father. As he preaches and teaches these things to you. Now, this sounds like a very strange practice to us. Because we live in a day and time.

Uh, where this Regular. Elder, visitation that facilitates and holds countable, and reinforces and supports the husband, and father ministry in the home. Has fallen off. But there have been times. When this was recovered times of reformation, which is just another word for recovering things. The bible says that we fall out of practice of doing according to the word of God, and it has been much blessed in those times as we would expect it to be.

Because God's word here calls it. Part of that helpful. Those helpful things. Nothing of which the apostle had held back or kept back. And nothing of which Uh, we would want To have kept back. So, the Lord helping us. We will do this as much as we may as much as we might.

For you. You have the blessing. Um, of as imperfect as I am as. As we fail much and stumble, much and many things, but you do have the blessing. Of having one of the Lord's elders, one of his ministers. To be. Husband and father, in your home. To, to teach these things to you to urge them upon you.

To lead you in praying to God. For them and so forth. But one of the things that we can pray for and seek from God as a first, he would help me in the preaching on the Lord's day. And that we would not just have it in one ear out the other.

Oh yes, that does seem to be God's design. Wouldn't that be interesting? And maybe even helpful if we did that and then a few months down the road, you remember that one time that Pastor breached about, uh, pastoral visitation and elder visitation? That sure was interesting. I wonder why we never did it.

May the Lord spare us from it. Because I have taught this once already. And we may well say the same thing actually. The vast majority of the church that is here. Now, we're not here at the time. That I taught that middle word. Give us. Give me. Courage and leadership in boldness.

And determination. But give us all. That we would have different results this time around. God, helping us. Let's pray. Our father in heaven. We praise you for how you have Devised to glorify yourself especially in the sun. Whom you have called, for us your word. And how you have invented language and communication.

That's something that imitates. How the Lord Jesus. How your son proceeds from you? And have blessed to us. Then your very own words and exalted your word above all your name. We praise you. Oh God for it. We thank you. Then forgiving us. To have your word at the heart.

Of your worship. We pray Lords that whether in our family works up, or whether in the public worship, you would give us your word in the various ways that we should have it. Lord help us to respond. Help us to receive. Your words as from you and interact with you.

By your word. Grant to us by your spirit and the fellowship that he gives us with himself with you are trying in God. To know you personally to interact with you personally. And grant to us to understand what your word teaches to have our minds stored up so that we may know and understand.

And, Have facility with the truth. Oh Lord. Forgive us. For you have given us everything that is helpful. And we have kept back much from ourselves. And yet you have been patient with us, you know, persisted with us. And here we are still receiving from your word and your great kindness and generosity to us.

And so, we pray that in the same love and which you continue to give it, you would come by your spirit and attend with your power. And grant to us to be more conformed to it. Grant, all these things we ask For Christ's glory. And using his name in which he has given us to be able to come to you.

And so we do ask it all. In Jesus name. Amen.